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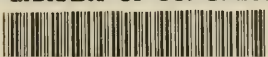

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A Memorial Sermon

DELIVERED BEFORE

CHARLES SUMNER POST, No. 9, G. A. R.
AND W. R. C. Nos. 1. AND 3,

BY THE

REV. ALEX. C. GARNER,
PASTOR OF PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
COR. 17TH AND P STREETS N.W.

SUBJECT:

PRINCIPLE OF PATRIOTISM.

SUNDAY, EVENING, MAY 25,
1902.

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PRINCIPLE OF PATRIOTISM.

"Who loved me and gave himself for me."—GAL. 2: 20.

Montesquieu in his Spirit of Laws gives the three forms of government as republican, monarchical and despotic. He says that the great necessity in a republic is virtue, in monarchy, honor, in a despotic government, fear. We live in a democracy, then virtue is necessary, not virtue in its ordinary sense, but virtue in its ancient sense, *i. e.* stamina, manliness, political goodness—which presupposes individual rectitude. The state leans on men, and is strong in proportion to their manliness; manliness that is surcharged with the heroic element, that knows the beauty and power of self-sacrifice, that loves the country for the good of the community, and makes one willing to shed all or a part of his blood to secure perpetual peace, honor, liberty and virtue to the rest of his fellows. This stamina, this kind of courageous manhood is the glory of any people. Virtue is a quality equally necessary in art, literature, commerce, politics, war and religion. It is a factor in the religion of the church—Christianity; it is an element in the religion of the state—Patriotism. And you, veteran sirs, are here to-night because you wish to show your devotion to the noblest qualities of our civilization, viz: religion and patriotism, love of God and love of country; nay, more,

the love of God who is no respecter of persons, the love of country whose Declaration of Independence says "that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Equals, then, according to the will of God and the declaration of man, we come to-night to build afresh upon the altar of memory the sacred fire of patriotism. Patriotism is as instinctive to the normal citizen as self-preservation. It is a heavenly gift. It is loyalty to your country and its welfare. It is the source and the life of honor. Because it was admired, practiced, reverenced by your comrades resting 'neath nature's verdant mantle, we are here to-night to do honor to their memory. In the Good Book we are told that Jesus loved us and gave himself for us (Gal. 2 : 20). Now what more can we ask of one than to give himself for us? Christ died to make us holy; you died to make us free. He was a prophet, and more; you are soldiers, and more. A prophet is not without honor save in his own country; a soldier is hardly with honor save in his own country. The soldier of a country is the consummate flower of the patriotism of that country.

Veterans of Charles Sumner Post, G. A. R., I am so glad that you have had opportunity to show to the world the patriotic fire of your souls. You remember the exiled Jew's patriotism expressed itself in a religious canticle that ran like this: "Upon the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept, when we remembered Zion * * * ", but the defiled Negro's patriotism expressed itself in no minor tones of Hebrew wailing, but in giving both to the Revolutionary

and the Civil Wars the first blood of their struggles (Crispus Attucks and Nick Biddle, respectively).

There are those who doubt the patriotism of our people, but if they "read history with their eyes and not with their prejudices" they may easily see their mistake. However, their notions are not without some reason; what race would suffer the civil inconveniences that we have suffered and continue to suffer, and still love the institutions of the country! What race sings more lustily than ours of "the land of the free and the home of the brave"! We do this with the proud consciousness that if we are not freely accorded our rights we will show our countrymen a real superiority by deserving them. De Tocqueville took a gloomy view of the black man's presence in America. He could see nothing but a precarious existence for a race that was alien to the common blood of the country, hence unable either to unite with or to separate from the dominant race. But even the more or less accurate prophecy of this student of political institutions has not changed or interfered with the onward progress of a race whose great heart quality makes it possible to love even its enemies. Not that the American is a real enemy to the Negro, but in too many cases he is an enemy to the scriptural doctrine of the brotherhood of man; to the just plea of equality of opportunity. But in spite of all, our fathers and brothers have never faltered in their duty to defend with their blood the Stars and Stripes, that the symbol of liberty might not pass from the occident. Veteran sirs, you come here to-night for no compliment from me, but it is due you and the memory of the honored dead to say that the record of the colored soldier is one of the finest examples of disinter-

ested patriotism the world has ever seen, and should be written on the pages of history in letters of gold. He fought for the liberty of others before he had his own. He died for a country he could hardly call his own. He defended the honor of the country one day in 1898, but his wounds had not healed before certain sections of the country whose flag and honor he planted on a beautiful hill in the "pearl of the Antilles", were scheming to rob him of the shibboleth of his liberty—the ballot.

If you were pessimists you might with the exiled Jew hang your harps on the willow and refuse to sing because in a strange land, but born in the dawn of optimism, though rocked in the cradle of adversity, you have never yet grown faint-hearted or discouraged. Like Job, who in the clutches of affliction looked to the source of all blessing and said "though he slay me yet will I trust in him," so the blacks with undaunted loyalty have ever turned to the American Flag and likewise saluted it. You see, veteran sirs, in my eulogy to the honored dead I am seeking to preach the gospel of patriotism that they left as a legacy to this and coming generations; a patriotism born out of their spilt blood, which is our remission from the taint of slavery, our atonement for the mistakes of the past.

Patriotism is loyalty dressed in freedom's robe, that stands on the hill of the present, holds aloft liberty's light to retrospect the deeds and records in the valley of the past, and to greet the promise of good times from the heralds of the future. Thus, we see that patriotism is a subtle influence that plays over and in the past, present and future. Those who forget the

noble deeds and the lofty inspirations of the fathers of the past, cannot give worthy character to the sons of the future. Patriotism is a duty and it also teaches a duty. The duty it teaches is this: that we should be willing to do that which is our duty to do. A paragraph from a private letter of Charles Gounod, the composer, better states what I have in mind, viz: "We are not in this world to do what we wish, but to be willing to do that which it is our duty to do." In the providence of God it became your duty to make for yourselves and your posterity a country; you did it on every battle-field in the history of the United States. Having won a country and a name it became your duty in common with other Americans to defend it with the same blood that purchased it; you did it. Having defended it, it is your duty to contend for the full enjoyment of the fruits of your costly purchase. What are the fruits? The right of the ballot, equality before the law. It is a perversion of logic to say that a man is fit to purchase the right of suffrage with his blood, but is not fit to use it, though he purchase it. Let us have and hold every right implied in American citizenship. As in old Rome every subject was proud of the words, *Civis Romanus*, so let us be proud of the words *Civis Americanus*. We have not all been soldiers nor can we be, but we may be, nay, we are, American citizens and patriots. Beecher said that mothers who are bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, are writing better declarations of independence than ever Thomas Jefferson inscribed. Humble fathers, though they never shouldered arms, who are training their children in essential manliness, in self-reliance, in independence

making them ashamed to beg and proud to rely upon their own resources, are patriots. The school-teacher, the honest business man, the conscientious editor who gives wings to helpful information, the preacher, the missionary, the quiet artisan, all who worked for enlarged manhood and truer liberty, are patriots. But the soldier more than any man deserves to wear the patriot's badge of honor, and memory must never grow weary of garnishing his grave with the flowers of devotion. I am pleased that you show in the name of your Post, appreciation of a man who after the Civil War fought for civil rights, and became by violence of Southern passion almost a vicarious sacrifice for the race whose cause he championed. Long live his memory! Long live the memory of the noble dead on whose graves, in whose blood, he founded his argument for civil equality.

The purpose of a memorial service is eulogy. Eulogy though born of appreciation is worth but little if it is not religious. Religion and patriotism happily always go hand in hand, but at this season of each year they clasp each other in holy embrace. At this service we may learn from the silence of the dead the meaning of the liberty we now enjoy. There is nothing more costly than liberty. There is nothing preferred before it. Only those who know what it is are willing to turn the blood of the race into a stream of sullen red, to perpetuate it. The comrades whose memory we honor to-night laid down their lives for us, but thank God when one dies for right principles, he dies into larger life. These soldiers laid down their lives for the perpetuation of the Union, for the maintenance of just government, for equality of meritorious man-

hood, for the abolition of slavery, for the diffusion of knowledge, for the development of order, for the spread of commerce, for the encouragement of science and the arts, for honesty in politics, for righteousness in the nation, for the freedom of the press, for the liberty of conscience, for the protection of feminine virtue, for manly courage, for the open door to all forms of industry and for every responsibility, burdensome or pleasing, which is the demand or guarantee of our Republican form of government—for these and more than these, our negro soldiers in common with the white soldiers died. These perhaps are greater blessings than they thought they were winning, but they won them just the same. Veterans, you got your practice in the handling of arms in the Civil War, but did you notice how well your sons honored the good name bequeathed to them in the Spanish-American War? Did it give you any hope, or make you think that your labors were not in vain to see them get there so gloriously? Steady as the nerve of your brothers at Wagner, Pillow or anywhere else, was also the nerve of your sons at San Juan. The world honors bravery; hero worship has not yet passed from the land. God himself is good and peaceful, but he has always somehow honored the fighting man. I do not mean the fussy man, but the fighting man. He gains glory on the field, honor among comrades and preferment in civil life. This is as it should be. I heard a man say the other day "the old soldier has got everything his way in this administration." I was glad to hear it even if it was not quite true. They ought to have it their way, for without them none of us would have had any way. Their blood purchased our liberty; let those remaining

eat the fruit of the land and sit at the best places at our political tables; and may the enjoyments of peace partially repay for the risks of war.

Fellow countrymen, veterans, patriotism is a noble virtue. By commending its divinity to you, I best honor the men who died because of it. It is a sentiment that pervades every human breast. The sentiment is so universal that no nation is without it, and in the highest state of civilization it grows into an exalted passion. The lines of Walter Scott:

> Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
> Who never to himself hath said,
> This is my own, my native land,

suggest the contempt of a man without the love of country.

Southey, I think it was, said, think what virtues arise out of feelings connected with the words, home, birthplace, native-land. Intelligence easily perceives a vital connection between even topography and patriotism. There is also the most vital union between patriotism and sacrifice. You have heard of the great chasm that opened in the Roman Forum, which the soothsayers said could not be filled but by that which was most valuable to the State. Then Marcus Curtius, an eminent soldier, mounted his war-horse, and full armed rode into the gulf, a noble sacrifice for his country. This conduct agrees with Virgil's idea, viz: "The noblest motive is the public good." This example of patriotism, according to Roman fable, while good, is too ancient for you modern veterans, but perhaps I can bring in a better example. I need not, for your minds are stored with scores of noble examples

more thrilling than I can relate. I have in mind, however, a good story of a negro who was a patriot before he could be a soldier. A company of soldiers defending Rodman's Point were overpowered by the enemy, and took possession of a scow, in which to cross the Tar river. When loaded it stuck fast in the mud. Exposure was certain death. Several soldiers were about to spring out from the sheltering sides to push it off, when a strong negro said, "You keep still, and save your life. I can't fight: I can push off the boat. If they kill me, it is nothing. You are soldiers, and they need you to fight." He leaped overboard, pushed the boat into the stream, and fell back pierced by seven bullets, a sacrifice to patriotism. Patriotism and religion are allies. In fact, patriotism is a kind of religion itself. A patriot is the best citizen; a praying patriot is the best saint. Pathetic stories of dying soldiers are often related, but those that breathe their last giving sweet religious testimony live longest in our memory. I am not a soldier, save of the Cross of Christ; but I feel a thrill of joy at the record you and your comrades in the grave have made. I understand that this service is a memorial to them. But in fact it is our own memorial. They need no marble cenotaph, for their monuments are already erected by their own imperishable deeds. They left their home at the call of their country; went through flood and flame, and storm, and cold, and hunger, and thirst, and sickness, and blood and death. They loved us and gave themselves for us. Since they were laid away the old world has gone on just the same. Their graves have been greeted each day by the kiss of the rising sun, his golden rays have covered their green breasts. Since they heard the boom of cannon, the

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rattle of musketry and the fierce yells of their brave comrades, the face of the world has fairly changed, but the pale moon bathes with her silvery light those hallowed spots where rest their honored dust. The seasons come and go; they rest on till the judgment. But we shall not forget them. Brave men of courage, we love their memory! Standing here to-night in the presence of the remnant of those who escaped, in the providence of God, death on the battle-field, we pledge ourselves, on account of the ideals of our country and the greatness of their sacrifice for these ideals to stand by the colors—the American Flag. I am an American citizen because the patriot's blood made me one. So are you. Veterans, friends, everybody, hear me. Our enemies may talk of all kinds of schemes for solving problems that arise by reason of our presence in this country, but as long as there is an old, musty, or mouldering tombstone to mark the grave of a negro soldier who fought for "liberty and union, one and inseparable, now and forever," we will point to it as the reason and the right of citizenship. And go away from this country? No, sir; as for me I did not bring myself here and I am not going to take myself away. Our forefathers came to this country on a very pressing invitation; the invitation to go away, though it has been given, has not since 1621 been pressing enough to be obeyed, and since our military service has been so valuable even the meanest white man is forced to get rid of us by the slow process of lynching, and for every one lynched a thousand are born. After all, veterans, God has hold of this country. All we have to do is to love it and give ourselves for it, and when the reveille of heaven rolls and the bugle sounds up yonder we'll be there.

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